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SUBJECT: "FORCING THE HENOKO PLAN WILL DAMAGE THE ALLIANCE": AMBASSADOR AND SDP HEAD FUKUSHIMA DISCUSS FRF

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN ROOS, REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Implementing the current Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) plan will "damage the U.S.-Japan Alliance," Social Democratic Party (SDP) President Mizuho Fukushima told the Ambassador 21 December. Despite arduous negotiations over 13 years, the existing plan has not been implemented for environmental, social, and historical reasons, SDP Diet Member and Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation (MLIT) Senior Vice Minister Kiyomi Tsujimoto added. Moreover, previous Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-led governments have "hidden information" on the FRF from the Okinawan people and led the United States to believe that the current plan was workable. It would be wrong to "force" the Henoko plan to be implemented as it would cause broader problems in the Alliance. The U.S. and Japan should work together to find a "better" solution than the existing one. The SDP "supports the U.S.-Japan Alliance," but does not believe Futenma can be relocated either within Okinawa or anywhere else in Japan. End Summary.

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"Current Plan Can't Work"

¶2. (C) Fukushima and Tsujimoto said that the current FRF plan was "unworkable" for environmental, historical, and social reasons. They added that previous LDP governments had been deceptive and were to blame for the fact that the plan had yet to move forward.

¶3. (C) Environmental Issues: Noting it would take over five million truckloads of landfill to build the FRF runways, Fukushima stressed the current plan would have a severely negative impact on the environment. The people of Okinawa's lives and religious beliefs are closely tied to the ocean, and the damage from Henoko construction would be akin to violation of a cultural asset, she added. Tsujimoto further pointed to a recent discovery of more than 30 new crab and shrimp species and said these habitats would be damaged or destroyed during construction. Given the close relationship that the Okinawan people have with the ocean, it is "impossible" for them to accept the environmental impact the FRF would have.

¶4. (C) Historical and Social Issues: Tsujimoto noted that since the end of World War II, no new U.S. military bases have been built on Okinawa and that construction of the runways at Camp Schwab would be seen as adding to the U.S. footprint in the prefecture. The death of 1 in 4 Okinawans during the war weighed heavily on the peoples' minds even today, she said, and even though FRF is technically a relocation there would be strong opposition to the move. Turning to incidents and accidents, Tsujimoto handed over Ministry of Defense-drafted documents listing crimes committed in the past several years by servicemembers in Okinawa. She said people in the Henoko area are "concerned" about the potential increase in crime that would allegedly come with FRF.

¶5. (C) Previous Government's Attitude: The previous LDP government, the Okinawan governor, and the mayor of Nago were all from the LDP and yet the plan still has not been implemented after more than 13 years of negotiations, Tsujimoto added. Both Fukushima and Tsujimoto expressed deep concerns over the previous government's approach to FRF, emphasizing that it did not convey to the United States how difficult the current plan would be to implement because of environmental, social, and historical factors. Past LDP-led governments "hid information" on plans for the Henoko facility, Tsujimoto said, and this has deepened the distrust of the plan by Okinawans.

¶6. (C) Tsujimoto pointed to statements made during Diet Foreign Affairs Committee deliberations over the Guam International Agreement, during which MOFA allegedly said that the Henoko plan and the movement of 8,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam were not linked. (Note: Embassy finds this to be highly unlikely, but Tsujimoto handed over documentation to this effect. We have yet to independently verify the veracity of this statement. End note.) This was in direct contrast to what the United States was saying about the agreement, she noted. What the previous Japanese government communicated to the United States on FRF and what it was saying domestically were two different things, Tsujimoto said, adding it would be critical for this issue to be "cleared up."

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Win The Battle, Negative Impact to Alliance

¶7. (C) Prime Minister Hatoyama has been consistent in his opposition to the Henoko plan, Tsujimoto said, and even now genuinely believes it will not work. If, however, the coalition government decides to move forward with the existing plan, over the strong opposition of the SDP, it will negatively impact the Alliance. The FRF will be the "Achilles heel" of the Alliance and while the base may ultimately get built, it will be like "lighting a fire" of opposition to all of the other bases in Okinawa, Tsujimoto stressed. She cautioned the United States not to attempt to force ahead an "impossible" plan.

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Out of Okinawa, Out of Japan, but "We Support the Alliance"

¶8. (C) The SDP is not opposed to the existing plan "for opposition's sake," but because it simply won't work, Tsujimoto said. Given how long the United States and Japan have been in discussion, the SDP does not believe it will be possible to implement the current plan. The United States and Japan should work together to come up with a "better" solution than the FRF. The Cabinet has made a decision to explore alternatives to the current plan, Fukushima said, but added that if the ultimate decision was to move ahead with Henoko, it would "make further problems." We want to explore solutions from a "long term perspective" rather than trying to implement the current plan. In spite of the opposition to FRF, "we support the U.S.-Japan Alliance," Fukushima stressed several times during the meeting.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador emphasized that the security situation in Northeast Asia is complex and that the current plan is one

that was endorsed after extensive negotiations between the United States and Japan and one that was arrived at after reviewing all possible alternatives. The Marine presence in Okinawa is essential to the deterrence factor that the United States provides for Japan. The United States needs our presence to meet our Security Treaty obligations, he added. The Ambassador asked Fukushima whether she foresaw a solution other than FRF in Okinawa or elsewhere in Japan. "The current plan is unworkable," she responded, but would not provide a direct answer. She wondered, though, whether "Guam or Iwo-To" would be feasible for the United States.

(Comment: It was clear during the conversation that neither Fukushima nor Tsujimoto were prepared to discuss specific alternative proposals, and it also appeared obvious they had not thought extensively beyond the "No to Henoko" position of the party. Several times during the conversation, the Ambassador pointed out that the SDP's position seemed to be not only opposition to Henoko, but also opposition to the Marines anywhere in Japan. Both Fukushima and Tsujimoto were evasive in their answers on this point. End comment.)

¶110. (C) The existing plan is a fine balance of a number of complex elements, but from the U.S. point of view is the only viable option, said the Ambassador. Moreover, he stressed, the current plan reduces the burden in Okinawa by closing Futenma, returning land to Japan, and moving 8,000 Marines to Guam. Working to find an alternative solution after an exhaustive search has already been done is not in the best interests of Okinawa or Japan. The Ambassador encouraged the SDP to keep these points in mind as the Cabinet goes through its examination of alternatives in the coming months.

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